

CHAPTER 7.0 COMMENTS AND COORDINATION

7.1 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

The public involvement process described throughout this section included residents and population groups in the study area and did not exclude any persons because of income, race, color, religion, national origin, sex, age or handicap. Opportunities to obtain maximum public input during the NEPA process and preparation of the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) have included local stakeholder meetings and public informational meetings. The following is a summary of these activities.

7.1.1 Local Stakeholders Meetings

The first local stakeholders meeting regarding the EIS was held on June 19, 2001, in Jasper. County and city officials representing the entire study area were given an overview of the project, including the project purpose and need and a summary of alternatives to be presented in the EIS. Several comments were received during the meeting and in letters following the meeting. Access to and future growth of the Huntingburg Airport was a major point of discussion during this meeting. Local officials stated their preference for a bypass alternative. Written comments received during and following this meeting are included in Appendix D.

A second local stakeholders meeting was held on April 18, 2002, in Huntingburg. County and city officials from the area attended, as did several members of the general public. Major issues discussed at this meeting included: property impacts of a bypass alternative, farmland impacts, emergency service vehicle travel patterns, traffic safety along existing U.S. 231, and railroad crossings of U.S. 231. The majority of the local and county officials were in favor of a bypass alternative. Many landowners voiced concerns over a bypass alternative primarily related to property impacts and long-term agricultural production in Dubois County.

7.1.2 Public Information Meetings

Two public information meetings were held to present corridor alternatives and to solicit public input. The meetings were publicized through news releases to area newspapers, radio stations and notices posted at various locations throughout the community. The first public meeting was held in Jasper and the second meeting was held in Huntingburg.

Meetings began in an "open house" format, allowing the public to view strip maps of the project area and various alternatives under consideration. Following this "open house" period, a brief formal presentation was made, followed by a public question and answer session. Comment sheets were provided as part of a project informational packet distributed at the beginning of each meeting. These comment sheets were collected during the meeting and via mail following the meeting.

7.1.2.1 Jasper High School Auditorium

The first public information meeting was held on June 19, 2001, at the Jasper High School Auditorium. Approximately 110 persons attended the meeting. The purpose of this meeting was to familiarize the public with the purpose and need for the project, to present those preliminary alternatives that were still being investigated as part of the project, and to allow the public to provide comments on these alternatives. Display exhibits included aerial strip maps of the project area depicting the preliminary

corridor alternative alignments, several constraint maps of the project area showing wetlands, upland forest, farmland, and other areas of importance, and a project informational packet, including a project summary, potential alternatives and a comment form. Written comments received during and following the meeting are maintained in the project file.

General comments received at or following this meeting included the following:

- Concerns over loss of farmland.
- Concerns over urban sprawl and loss of downtown businesses.
- Potential natural resource impacts.
- Potential impacts to private property.
- Potential impacts to Huntingburg Lake.

7.1.2.2 Southridge High School Auditorium

The second public information meeting was held on April 18, 2002, in the Southridge High School Auditorium in Huntingburg. The meeting was attended by approximately 250 people from both communities. This meeting was held to present the results of the alternative screening analysis and the recommended detailed study alternatives and to provide the public an opportunity to comment on the proposed alternatives.

Display exhibits, including aerial strip maps showing the three recommended detailed study alternatives, were available for public review at this meeting. A project information packet was provided to the public that included a project summary, purpose and need for the project, alternatives considered, and a comment form. Following a brief presentation, the public was given the opportunity to provide verbal comments. All comments received at this meeting were recorded in the official Public Information Meeting Transcript, which is on file with both INDOT and FHWA. Written comments received during and following this meeting are maintained in the project file.

The major comments received at this meeting included:

- Preservation of agricultural land.
- Potential impacts to private property, including farm operations, businesses and residences.
- Access to private property.
- Traffic safety on existing U.S. 231 and the proposed bypass.
- Statements both in favor of and against the proposed improvements to U.S. 231.
- The mayor of Huntingburg indicated that a document has been signed by the mayors of Owensboro, Rockport, Huntingburg and Jasper in support of Alternative 27.

7.2 AGENCY COORDINATION

7.2.1 Early Coordination

Early coordination letters were sent on October 6, 2000, to state and federal agencies and local stakeholders to familiarize them with the project and allow them the opportunity to provide comments or concerns. Early coordination letters were sent to the following state and federal agencies and local officials:

- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)
- U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service
- National Park Service
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Region V*
- U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
- U.S. Department of the Army, Corps of Engineers, Louisville District
- U.S. Coast Guard
- Indiana Department of Natural Resources*
- Indiana Department of Transportation, Aeronautics Section*
- Indiana Department of Environmental Management (IDEM)*
- Indiana Geological Survey*
- Dubois County Commissioners
- Dubois County Engineer*
- City of Huntingburg*
- City of Jasper
- Jasper Chamber of Commerce
- Huntingburg Chamber of Commerce
- Indiana Historical Society
- Dubois County Historical Society, Inc.
- Dubois County Airport Authority

* Indicates those agencies that responded to early coordination.

A summary of agency comments received as part of early coordination is provided below. Early coordination response letters are found in Appendix D.

Federal Agencies

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| November 2, 2000 | Letter from the EPA responding to the initial letter and discussing measures to minimize adverse impacts to the natural environment as part of the project, including wetlands, water quality, rivers/streams, floodplains, wildlife, air quality, noise, environmental justice and hazardous materials. |
| November 6, 2000 | Letter from the USFWS, Bloomington Field Office, responding to the initial letter and noting threatened and endangered species whose range is within the project area. |

State Agencies

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| October 25, 2000 | Letter from the Indiana Geological Society indicating the project corridor is located within Seismic Zone 2A and describing geology in the project area. |
| November 3, 2000 | Letter from the INDOT Aeronautics Section describing the landscape surrounding the Huntingburg Airport and indicating the location of the new roadway will need to clear the Runway Protection Zone (RPZ) set up by the FAA approved Airport Layout Plan. |

- December 19, 2000 Letter from the Indiana DNR responding to the initial letter and commenting on several environmental issues within the project corridor. Issues specifically addressed in the letter include potential floodplain impacts, impacts to wetlands and upland forests, and the presence of two state endangered species within the corridor. This letter also indicated three nature preserves/conservation areas within the corridor.
- January 12, 2001 Letter from the IDEM providing comments on potential effects on the environment. Comments were received from the Office of Water Quality and the Office of Land Quality; comments regarding air quality were also received.

Local Agencies

- October 13, 2000 Letter from the city of Huntingburg in support of the proposed improvements to U.S. 231. The letter also indicated a need for a grade separation at the Norfolk-Southern Railroad crossing.
- October 27, 2000 Letter from the Dubois County Commissioners providing comments on the proposed project. One comment was in regard to connecting this project with the U.S. 231 project in Spencer County. (INDOT plans to connect the two projects at the I-64 interchange.) The letter also indicated access to the Huntingburg Airport and relocated SR 162 should be included as part of the U.S. 231 project.

7.2.2 Interagency Review Meeting - June 2001

A letter was sent on May 18, 2001, to all federal, state and local agencies to invite them to an Interagency Review meeting on June 20, 2001. As discussed in Section 7.1, separate local stakeholder and public information meetings were held on June 19, 2001.

Three resource agencies, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Indiana DNR, Division of Historic Preservation and Archaeology, as well as FHWA and INDOT personnel and consultants, attended the meeting. Major topics discussed at the meeting included purpose and need of the project, and potential impacts to natural resources and cultural resources. The issues discussed at the meeting are presented in the meeting minutes included in Appendix D. All interested parties took a tour of the project area.

Several comment letters were received following the meeting. Those comments received from federal, state and local agencies are summarized below and are included in Appendix D.

Federal Agencies

- May 24, 2001 Letter from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Forest Service indicating the U.S. 231 project area is outside of the Hoosier National Forest boundary and; therefore, no additional information was provided.
- May 25, 2001 Letter from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development indicating the project information had been forwarded to their Chicago office. No additional comments were received.

May 30, 2001	Letter from the U.S. Department of Transportation, U.S. Coast Guard indicating a Coast Guard bridge permit would not be required as part of the U.S. 231 project.
July 23, 2001	Letter from the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service indicating that the U.S. 231 project would not impact resources within the agency's area of concern.
November 14, 2001	Letter from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Louisville District, indicating the U.S. 231 project will require a Section 404 permit for impacts to wetlands and waters of the United States.

State Agencies

August 14, 2001	Letter from the IDEM commenting on potential effects to the environment. The letter included comments from the Office of Water and Biotic Quality and the Office of Land Quality. Comments related to air quality were also included in this letter.
October 1, 2001	Letter from the Indiana DNR in regards to Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act.

Local Agencies

July 6, 2001	Letter from city of Jasper in support of a U.S. 231 bypass around Jasper.
July 9, 2001	Letter from the Dubois County Commissioners expressing several comments related to the proposed project. Access to industrial areas and the airport and potential impacts to farmland were discussed in this letter.

7.2.3 Interagency Review Meeting - April 2002

An interagency review meeting was held on April 17, 2002, at the Indiana Government Center North in Indianapolis. Federal, state and local agencies were invited to this meeting to discuss those alternatives recommended for detailed study.

Agencies in attendance included U.S. EPA, IDNR Nature Preserves Section, IDNR Historic Preservation and Archaeology, and the INDOT Aeronautics Section. FHWA and INDOT personnel and consultants also attended. Major topics discussed at the meeting included potential impacts to airport expansion, natural resources impacts and the alternative screening process in general. Following the presentation and discussion, an agreement was reached between all agencies in attendance to carry two build alternatives (Alts. 27 and 28) and the No-Build Alternative forward for detailed study. All issues and comments discussed at the meeting are presented in the meeting minutes included in Appendix D.

Several comment letters were received from state agencies following the meeting (Appendix D). Comments received are summarized below.

April 16, 2002	Letter from the IDNR, Division of Historic Preservation and Archaeology, commenting on the proposed project. The letter included information relating to the Section 106.
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- May 9, 2002 Letter received from INDOT's Aeronautics section reiterating statements made at the April meeting. This letter states that the detailed study alternatives that remained at the time of this letter would be adequate for airport expansion.
- June 25, 2002 Letter received from the IDNR, Division of Water, again referencing the location of two nature preserves in the project area: Buffalo Flats Nature Preserve and Wening-Sheritt Seep Springs Nature Preserve. The boundaries of another natural area in the project corridor, Barnes-Seng Wetland Conservation Area, were also included with this letter.

7.2.4 Threatened and Endangered Species Coordination

A letter was sent to the USFWS on September 12, 2002, requesting a determination of potential impacts on habitat for the federally endangered Indiana bat (*Myotis sodalis*). Aerial photographs with a digital overlay of detailed study Alternatives 27 and 28 were provided showing a 1.6 km (1-mi) wide study corridor and the 91.4 m (300 ft) wide road corridor. Upland forests and wetlands were shown on the aerial photo and potential impacts to these areas were identified in the legend.

A response letter from the USFWS was received on October 16, 2002, (Appendix D) stating that the two bypass alternatives would not likely adversely affect the Indiana bat if seasonal tree clearing is implemented in areas where large forest blocks would be cleared for construction. This agency strongly recommends Alternative 28 be chosen as the Preferred Alternative as it would have the least amount of potential impacts to Indiana bat habitat.

7.2.5 Section 106 - Consulting Parties Coordination

On January 22, 2002, the FHWA sent a letter to several Native American tribes and historical societies inviting them to become a consulting party for the proposed project. This letter and a list of all parties contacted are included in Appendix E. Of the 12 invitation letters sent out, two parties responded and agreed to participate as a consulting party: The Historic Landmarks Foundation of Indiana and the Delaware Nation, a recognized Native American tribe located in Oklahoma.

On May 23, 2002, a letter was sent to the consulting parties to provide an update on the status of the project and to present the Area of Potential Effect (APE) agreed upon by the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) at the April 2002 meeting (meeting minutes, Appendix D). This letter, along with a response letter received from the Delaware Nation, is included in Appendix E.

On November 26, 2003, a letter was sent to the consulting parties to provide an update on the project. Included with the letter were the Finding of Area of Potential Effect and Eligibility (APE) signed by FHWA on October 2, 2003, and the Finding of Effect signed on November 20, 2003, both of which are included in Appendix E. The findings of eligibility and effect apply to historic structures only. Consulting parties were given a 30-day comment period, after which no responses were received. All consulting parties coordination is included in Appendix E.